

Cobb County Extension Service

CAREFUL "CHITLINS" COOKING

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Each holiday season, outbreaks of foodborne illness caused by *Yersinia enterocolitica* plague Georgians. Even though the name of the bacteria is difficult to pronounce here are some facts about this illness.

The source?

Yersinia can be found in pigs and other animals.

Who gets sick?

Anyone that consumes the bacteria can get sick. However, in Georgia, most of these infections occur in children less than 5 years old, especially babies less than two years old.

The problem?

Cross contamination from chitterlings, commonly called "chitlins" is a problem. Small children come in contact with the bacteria in the kitchen where chitterlings are cleaned. The bacteria contaminates hands and kitchen surfaces. Anything that has touched raw chitterlings or their juice could have the bacteria present.

The symptoms?

Symptoms usually begin within 3 to 7 days. Common symptoms are diarrhea, fever and stomach pains. Younger children and babies sometimes have severe bloody diarrhea. Older children and adults may experience appendicitis-like abdominal pain. Some people will have to be hospitalized.

Prevention?

Work with chitlins in one small area of the kitchen. Use only chitterlings that are pre-cooked or pre-boil chitterlings for 5 minutes before cleaning. This boiling process will kill the bacteria so it will not spread throughout the kitchen. While chitterlings are boiling, the Department of Human Resources recommends cleaning the kitchen thoroughly with scouring powder.

This cleaning process would need to include sinks, pans, counters and any utensils that have come in contact with the chitlins or juice. After cleaning and rinsing thoroughly to remove all traces of scouring powder, a chlorine bleach solution of 1 tablespoon per gallon of warm water could be used as an extra measure of protection. Apply this solution to surfaces and allow it to air-dry. Once the chitterlings have been "pre-boiled" they should be cleaned as usual. Cook the chitlins thoroughly before they are eaten.

Don't forget to thoroughly clean hands.

Safe steps in food handling, cooking and storage are essential to avoiding foodborne illness. For tips on preparing your holiday meals safely call our Extension office 770-528-4090.